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ABSTRACT

Noting that major publishers have begun to depict a more balanced portrayal of ethnic story characters and content in their basal reading series, a study was conducted to investigate the extent to which stories depicting the three largest ethnic groups in the United States were contained in nine of the major and current basal reading series (grades one through six). Blacks, Hispanics, and native Americans were examined in the study since they represent the largest minorities nationwide, while a fourth group labeled "multiethnic" enabled the coding of information about stories with major characters from more than one ethnic group. The study sought to determine the amount of ethnic content contained in the series, whether a particular series emphasized a greater number of stories about one ethnic group over others, and the ways that such information could benefit individuals interested in purchasing new basal series. The results indicated that no single basal series offered more ethnic content for a particular group than another, and that practically all nine series included a greater occurrence of stories about blacks and multiethnic groups than about native Americans and Hispanics. (HTH)

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"An Examination of Ethnic Content in Nine Current Basal Reading Series"

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Introduction

During the past several years, publishers of basal reading series have focused considerable attention on recognizing the influence of ethnicity in basal reading series (Rupley, Garcia, and Longnion, 1981). Portrayal of ethnic story characters and story content are evidenced in current basal series in order that a more balanced depiction of minority groups be represented. The concern for and value of balanced ethnic portrayals in basal reading series has been addressed in various investigations (Kyle, 1978; Butterfield, 1979; Campbell and Wirtenberg, 1980).

In a study of story content in seven basal reading series published in the mid-1970s, Kyle (1978) reported that ethnic minority characters portrayed in sixth grade basals are usually well-known historical or contemporary figures rather than fictional characters involved in realistic, modern situations. It was also reported that the sixth grade basals characterized minority adults only in professional or all-adult settings. The results of the study also indicated sixth grade basals offered few examples of integrated groups of children and that only 15 stories at the sixth grade level related the activities of a racially mixed group. Kyle (1978) concluded:

> The activities of minority and nonminority characters should convey the fact that aspirations, talents, feelings and interests are not related to race...(Basal) readers must be developed and evaluated with an understanding of all the learnings-overt and incidental-that they can produce...Newly published materials (basal readers) indicate that this understanding has not yet been fully reached (p.305).

Although it is generally accepted that major publishers of basal reading series have made attempts to enhance the quantity and quality of their materials by depicting a more balanced portrayal of ethnic story characters and story content, current research investigations addressing the extent of such attempts are very limited. Past studies have focused on either a particular grade level or only a few levels in basal reading series, in contrast to surveying all levels of a particular reading series or group of basal reading series. A major purpose of this study was to investigate the extent to which stories depicting the three largest ethnic groups are contained in nine of the major and current basal reading series (grade one through grade six). Blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans were used in the study since they represent the largest minorities nationwide. A fourth group labeled "Multiethnic" enabled the authors to code information about stories that featured major characters from more than one ethnic group.

The authors sought answers to the following questions regarding ethnic content by examining nine current basal reading series:

1. What amount of ethnic content is contained in nine of the major basal reading series; and are there differences in the amount of ethnic content contained in these series?

2. Is there a particular basal reading series that emphasizes a greater number of stories about Blacks, Hispanics, or Native American Indians than others; and to what extent are these differences evident among the basal reading series?

3. In what ways can such information benefit individuals interested in purchasing a new basal reading series?

Developing Guidelines for Examination of the Nine Basal Reading Series

Guidelines are often provided by publishers of basal reading series to specify the extent to which they intend to include and depict ethnic groups within the structure of their specific format. It is the authors' contention that minorities should be depicted as accurately as possible, in a variety of roles and settings, and exhibiting a wide range of human behaviors and emotions. In addition, story characters should be depicted in varied family settings and in problem as well as recreational situations.

To facilitate the development of specific categories and sub-categories in evaluation charts developed and used in the study, commercial guidelines available from two major publishers were selected as sources for depiction of Blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans in basal reading series (MacMillan, 1975; Houghton-Mifflin, 1981). A sampling of the major guidelines from both publishers are presented below to indicate the publishers' attempts

to offer accurate, objective, and balanced portrayals and to eliminate stereotypic and distorted characterizations.

MacMillan (1975) guidelines include:

1. Represent blacks in all communities, urban, suburban, rural, well-to-do as well as middle class and poor. When discussing urban problems, include the role of white people.
2. Issues of concern to modern Indians should be treated honestly. The strengths and pride of American Indians should be shown. Indian characters should be three-dimensional.
3. Show Hispanic people in a variety of roles, women as well as men working outside the home and in the home. Aim for balance.

Houghton-Mifflin (1981) guidelines include:

1. Present members of minority groups in the full spectrum of jobs. Include blue-collar, white collar, executive, and professional members of each minority group.
2. Include meaningful relationships between members of different minority groups and between members of minority groups and majority groups.
3. Recognize the social and economic barriers that restrict racial and ethnic minorities.
4. Show relationships and cooperation between older persons and people of all ages.
5. Depict with sensitivity and accuracy the unique experiences of minority groups in the United States.

Categories for coding ethnic story content from the nine basal reading series used in this study were developed based on these guidelines. In addition, the authors' experience in the area of ethnic content in texts were employed. Due to space limitations, categories and sub-categories regarding each of the four groups examined are not provided, but may be obtained by contacting the authors.

Results and Discussion

The percentage table labeled Figure One indicates the amount of ethnic content reported in the nine basal reading series examined.

Place Figure One About Here.

There is a distinct within-group consistency throughout the nine basal reading series examined in regard to the amount of ethnic stories. This implies that generally speaking, the amount of content regarding ethnic groups among the major basal reading series is basically parallel and that no single basal reading series offers more ethnic content for a particular group than another. Of the four ethnic areas examined, practically all nine current basal reading series included a greater occurrence of stories about Blacks and Multiethnic groups than stories focusing on Native Americans and Hispanics. This information apparently contradicts earlier research findings of few examples of integrated groups in the basals and supports the notion that there is an increase in multiethnic story content.

Total percentages among the nine basal reading series indicates that the total number of ethnic stories included in the major basal reading series do not vary significantly. This information can prove beneficial to individuals interested

in securing a new basal reading series but speaks only to the quantity of ethnic content and not to its quality within the nine basal reading series.

Publishers of basal reading series need to consider including additional stories about Hispanic groups since recent governmental reports project that the Hispanic population will increase rapidly and by the turn of the century, will surpass the Black population as being the largest minority group nationwide. Classroom reading teachers who have a large population of Hispanic children in their classrooms should consider supplementing the basal reading program with appropriate Hispanic literature and tradebooks to better enhance the developmental reading program.

Summary

Publishers of current basal reading series are recognizing the value of ethnicity in story content. There are very few discernable differences in the amounts of story content found in the current basal reading series examined. Indeed, the major basal reading series parallel closely regarding the amount of ethnic content presented. There is a considerably higher degree of stories about integrated groups than have been included in earlier basal reading series. Classroom reading teachers and administrators interested in purchasing a current basal reading series should be conscious of these similarities within existing series. Supplementary materials

related to specific ethnic groups are recommended to enhance current offerings in basal readers.

FIGURE ONE.

PERCENTAGE TABLE OF ETHNIC CONTENT IN NINE CURRENT BASAL READING SERIES

Publisher/Stories Date	Hispanic	Black	Native Americans	Multiethnic	Total
MacMillan (1980) N=427	3.0	6.0	5.0	4.0	18
Open Court (1979) N=528	1.0	4.0	4.0	5.0	14
Rand McNally (1979) N=347	2.0	6.0	4.0	5.0	17
Houghton-Mifflin (1981) N=391	3.0	6.0	4.0	5.0	18
Ginn and Company (1980) N=404	1.0	4.0	4.0	9.0	18
Laidlaw (1980) N=269	2.0	6.0	4.0	9.0	21
Addison-Wesley (1982) N=608	0.5	4.0	2.0	12.0	19
Scotts-Foresman (1981) N=456	2.0	6.0	2.0	10.0	20
Holt, Rinehart and Winston (1980) N=409	2.0	5.0	2.0	9.0	18
Total Stories = 3839	x = 1.8	x = 5.2	x = 3.4	x = 7.6	x = 18

(Logan and Garcia, '82)

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Basal Reading Series Evaluated

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Houghton Mifflin Reading Program (1981), Houghton Mifflin Company: Boston, Massachusetts.

Laidlaw Reading Program (1980), Laidlaw Brothers Publishers: River Forest, Illinois.

Rand McNally Reading Program - Young America Basic Series (1979), Rand McNally and Company: Chicago, Illinois.

Reading 720: Rainbow Edition (1980), Ginn and Company: Lexington, Massachusetts.

Scott, Foresman Reading (1981), Scott, Foresman and Company: Glenview, Illinois.

Series r: Macmillan Reading (1980), Macmillan Publishing Co. Inc.: New York, New York.

The Addison-Wesley Reading Program (1982), Addison- Wesley Publishing Company: Reading, Massachusetts.

The Headway Readers, (1979), Open Court Publishing Company: La Salle, Illinois.